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ABSTRACT

This speech was delivered at a conference of student body presidents and college and university presidents. The major purpose of the conference was to help open and maintain clear channels of communication between those who run the colleges and universities, and those who attend them. The major points of the speech were: (1) education is not over at the diploma stage, because the price of survival in this society is life-long learning; (2) each person should develop a plan for life-long learning about the world he lives in. This plan should include the study of language, science, economics, ecology, mathematics, psychology, geopolitics, history and anthropology; (3) it is the task and responsibility of the institution's presidents to help the students to such a plan. The suggestion was made that each university president meet with his institution's student body president to help him formulate his plan for learning. (AF)

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ON BEING EDUCATED IN 1991*

By Dr. Terrel H. Bell
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As close observers of the college scene, you will all, I am sure, recall the slogan, "Don't Trust Anyone Over Thirty." Last April, the former college student who coined that phrase turned thirty himself.

Since I turned thirty myself quite a few years back, I cannot help taking a certain nasty satisfaction in his melancholy fate. Turning thirty, in a sense, resembles falling in love: try as you will to avoid it, it happens to the best of us. Soon after either catastrophe strikes--love or age thirty--you find yourself doing lots of silly things you never thought you would--like paying insurance premiums, putting up storm windows, and telling your children that broccoli is good for them. Editorial columns of our more sober newspapers call this "meeting your responsibilities;" the underground press calls it "selling out"--and there are times when I'm not sure which group of pundits has a better handle on the truth.

But the people of this Nation of whatever chronological age are stuck with each other. We all share the same shrinking piece of real estate. And I firmly believe those of us over thirty--whether we've sold out or not--can be useful to the under-thirties.

Take scientists for example. If every young physicist, mathematician, chemist, and biologist had to start from scratch--with just the knowledge

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*Before the annual Presidents to Presidents Conference of the Association of Student Governments, Sheraton Park Hotel, Washington, D.C. 4:30 p.m., Saturday, September 26, 1970.

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he had managed to develop on his own--we'd still be doing dances under the full moon to please the Corn God. No scientist stands alone. Everyone, as John Newton said, stands on the shoulders of his predecessors, refining what he has inherited and, with luck and hard work, adding to and improving the legacy he will pass on. Scientific progress depends on successful communication between the young scientist and the older one.

So it is with all progress, including that of each individual. Listening to older people does not mean perpetuating the past or slavishly imitating one's fathers. It does imply a recognition that the history of the race, of the nation, of the community has lessons to offer, that one generation can benefit from the successes and the mistakes of generations that have gone before.

The essence of this transfer of knowledge is awareness of the need to communicate--so I find it really attractive these days, when the necessary communication between generations is threatened, to address an organization such as this. Your stated purpose is to "help open and maintain clear channels of communication" between those who run the colleges and universities, and those who attend them. We certainly need such channels.

In the spirit of aiding and abetting a worthwhile enterprise I would like to propose a simple communication project to you, one in which each student president and each university president would be involved as members of a two-man team. If you do it, the project will

challenge you both and benefit you both. The work is hard but can be done in the comfort of a living room, an automobile, or an airplane. In fact, you can start on it while you're flying or driving home together.

Now, maybe the time isn't ripe to talk to you about work. You College and University Presidents have a fearsome academic year immediately at hand and hardly need a new project. But I'll risk it.

You student presidents are entering your senior year--and senior year is a very good year. If you have managed your college careers so far with any degree of perspicacity, you have your degree requirements just about filled, and you have plenty of electives--those two-hour classes in badminton or T-grouping in which everybody gets a B. The males among you can greet freshmen girls with a better-than-average chance of winning a wide-eyed reception. Senior year is a very good year.

But that brings up a key point. <u>It is also a somewhat deceptive and dangerous year, for it suggests that for many of you your formal education is, at long last, about to end</u>.

Yet, if you students believe that your education is over that day in June 1971 when you receive your diploma, you're mistaken. About all you have is an admission ticket to the most promising, puzzling, rapidly changing and stimulating society known to man. And the price of survival in that society is continuing, lifelong learning.

You'll know a lot by June 1971. The question is: How much of it will be true...or relevant...or useful...by 1981---1991--or 2001?

This is, as all you college and university presidents know, a favorite theme of commencement speeches--and you may even now be wincing inwardly to think that you have to suffer another variation on it. The difference is that my proposal suggests that you perform a positive action instead of simply going away and forgetting about the speech as quickly as possible. In the past, when educators praised the virtues of lifelong education, we emphasized the individual pleasure accruing from the continuing pursuit of truth, beauty, and all those other swell things. We imagined the graduates of our institutions--fatigued after a day of selling soap or subordinated debentures--coming home and sinking gratefully into a chair with a Great Book.

There was a considerable degree of self-deception in that fond vision. As A.E. Housman pointed out in a poem that partly celebrated the merits of beer, "Malt does more than Milton can/ To justify God's ways to man." The frustrated middle-management executives of our day, tired trying to fathom the mysterious providence of The Organization, undoubtedly draw more consolation from the Beverly Hillbillies than from Plato's Republic.

I'm sure that you seniors will have derived enough from your education up to now to stand you in good stead in moments of personal gloom. A well-balanced education provides, among other things, a form of emotional capital upon which a person can draw for the rest of his life. <u>But lifelong education means more than personal pleasure today; it means personal survival</u>.

I don't just mean professional survival; certainly constant attention to one's professional training is a necessary and parallel activity to lifelong education. An engineer's education is obsolete within 10 to 15 years after his graduation, and the same discomforting phenomenon is apparent in my own field. The last decade has brought a bewildering variety of new concepts into education: modular scheduling, inquiry-directed learning, continuous progress, computer-assisted instruction, PPBS and PERT and Management Information Systems. It all adds up to the most widespread revision of curricula that has ever taken place in American education and demands continuous updating for the professionals in the education business.

Professional retraining is not, however, the kind of continuing education I'm really talking about. I sincerely believe that each person ought to develop a <u>personal</u> plan for lifelong learning--learning about the world we live in, the people that inhabit it, the environment--physical and social--that we find around us, the sciences, the arts, and the literature we have inherited and are creating, but most of all, the way the world's peoples are interacting with each other. If you educate yourself in these things, you will have a pretty good chance, I believe, of survival and of a good life. And you here today will be better equipped for continuing the role of leadership which you have already begun.

In our age more than in any other, events are altering the traditional lines of human endeavor. And if you are to be sensitive

to the emerging needs that social change produces, you must have a personal plan, a systematic program, for keeping your balance on this spinning globe. And if you're going to accurately gauge the importance of each day's events in the years to come, you will have to enlarge constantly the amount of knowledge you have about what's happened in the world before now. It may be trite to say "Past is prelude," but it's true.

So here is the project I propose to you student presidents as you begin your last year of college.

First, recognize that the education you will need to survive in the world, and to occupy a position of leadership, will require continuous study, formal or informal. Second, use this year to think out what you must do in each intervening year to assure that you will be an educated person in 1991.

That's easy to say. But how do you do it?

Let's take a few specifics...nine of them.

First, language. You probably speak fluent American and pretty good English. Maybe a little French or Spanish. But in 1991, will you also need to know Russian...or Chinese...or Urdu to move effectively throughout the world?

Second, science. You probably know more about the sciences than any man alive in the 18th Century. But scientific knowledge is doubling every decade and if you don't expand your 1971 knowledge systematically, you may be lost by 1991.

Third, economics. You probably have a better understanding of the field than Adam Smith ever dreamed of. But what will the economics of capitalism be in 1991--or socialism, or communism? The USSR is using worker incentives--a capitalistic device. Here in the U.S. the long-time Socialist Party candidate for President declined to run again, saying everything he had advocated when first he ran had been accomplished.

Fourth, ecology. What you may know now will be obsolete in five years as researchers come to grips with this giant. It will cost your generation a great deal of money if you understand the problems. It may cost you your life if you don't.

Fifth, mathematics. Most 50-year olds are wary of the new math and run from binary numbers. You don't. But this field, the queen of the sciences, won't stand still. The probability theorists of 1991 may be deciding what to do with your dollars and maybe your freedom--so you'd better keep up with them.

Sixth, psychology. In this day of encounter groups and sensitivity training, we're learning that psychological techniques can help us live together better. But in your leadership role tomorrow you'll have to make judgements that affect other people's careers and even their lives. Will you be able to rely on the new psychological tests of 1981 and 1991 to make these judgements? It would seem wise for you to keep abreast in this field so you'll be able to know if the proposals of psychologists in 1981 will bring delight or disaster.

Seventh, geopolitics. A lot of men my age had to learn the hard way where Port Darwin and Iwo Jima are. And Pusan and Seoul. Maybe some of you have learned the hard way about Saigon and Hue and Danang. Someone may tell you one day that America's interests are vitally affected by the situation in Kabul, or La Paz or Columbo, or Accra. You'd better know where they are.

Eighth, history and anthropology. Santayana's comment that those who fail to study history are doomed to repeat its mistakes, best states the reason why, as future leaders, you must continue the investigation of history. And anthropology tells you the nature of man--the chief thing you have to work with if you're going to make this a better world by 1991.

Ninth, general knowledge. We educators are planning all kinds of things to make the Americans yet unborn more aware, more understanding, more articulate, and more qualified intellectually than any prior generation of Americans. So you'd better run fast to keep ahead in general knowledge or you'll never be able to communicate with or relate to the students of the 1990's--some of whom may be your own kids. If your son or daughter comes home from high school and asks for help with a term paper on "The Effect of cis-olefins on Gene Mutation", you'd better not ask who Sis and Jean are or you'll lose the communication campaign right there!

That's enough to start with. I think you student presidents have heard enough to see what I'm getting at.

Now, let me turn to the other half of the audience, those august ladies and gentlemen who have been sitting here so comfortably because they thought this sermon was directed at students. "There is a tradition in speeches," a wise commentator once wrote, "which holds that the speech itself is therapeutic. The benefit lies in the articulation. No ensuing action is required or even expected."

If you find this speech therapeutic, fine. But I'd like to tamper with that tradition by asking you, too, for some action.

You college and university presidents are all successful educators. Perhaps I should say that you have <u>been</u> successful educators--before the various financial, administrative, and political pressures of your jobs turned each of you into a composite of genteel beggar, precinct captain, and commissar. Anyhow, when I use the word <u>education</u>, it probably rings a bell from your past. You might, in a wistful way, like to revisit that past for a few days...days that would be spread out over the next academic year.

<u>You know how to develop a plan for learning; that's your business</u>. Some of your plans have succeeded, some have failed; the majority probably had to be modified to reflect subsequent events. At any rate, you know how to go about the job--and I want to suggest that as you and your accompanying student-body president return to your respective institutions, you use that time to start working out a plan to assure that he will be an educated man in 1991. Not a plan for the entire student body, but for that single representative of it who sits alongside you. That's your part in the project.

I would urge that you do not delegate the task. Don't turn it over to a dean, refer it to the faculty senate, or give it into the tender charge of a committee. Make this a one-to-one project, so that together you can dig into the really important problems of an individual life. What does your client want from the years ahead? Money? Power? Love? Fame? The feeling that he has pushed himself to his limit? What kind of impact does he want to have on his time? What fields of leadership suit his interests? How might he -- through continuous learning -- broaden these interests, sharpen his abilities, and reach his fullest potential?

All of you old presidents, I'm sure--by old I mean over 30--can legitimately object that you don't have time. Make time, because if you really enter into this project, you'll save time later. For one thing, you will have a fascinating experience to talk about on all those occasions when you have to address the Freshmen Mothers or the Sophomore Weathermen, but have nothing new to say. "A funny thing happened to me on the way back from Washington last month," you could begin. "I met a student who wanted to become a truly educated man in the terms and requirements of 1991."

For another, you might find the grueling, demanding, personal attempt to define educational objectives in the light of a single life 20 years hence extremely valuable when it comes to defining and rethinking the goals of your institution. The student cry for relevance is forcing

us all to entertain second thoughts about curriculum, instructional technique, evaluation of student performance, and the rest. Any of us who asks honest questions in these areas is usually compelled to acknowledge that perhaps some of the things we knew about education just aren't so. The best way to find out about the quality of service your institution offers is to test its offerings in terms of the needs 20 years hence of one of its clients--provided you make it clear to the client that you want an honest exploration of the unknown by two co-equal explorers. Young people make good companions on such an adventure into the unknown. But they can tune out quickly if one of us over-thirties starts to act like a clairvoyant.

The logistics of the plan I leave to you; if you can overcome a certain hesitancy the novelty of the thing may cause, if you examine imaginatively and creatively the really wonderful possibilities for mutually enriched understanding that such a program holds out, the flow-chart will diagram itself. Plans will undoubtedly work out differently in different cases. Some will involve formally arranged meetings, some casual bull sessions - maybe once a month, maybe less; perhaps books or articles from learned journals will be exchanged, or just thoughts jotted on a few scraps of paper. However it is done, the important thing is to do it.

So there's the project. I hope you will try it and I hope you will succeed. The benefits to you both from a success experience are potentially very great.

But beyond the personal and institutional advantages to both of you, there would be another beneficiary--the field of education itself. You represent approximately 400 colleges and universities--a significant sample of the country's institutions of higher education. If you Presidents could carry forward this modest project in person-to-person communication across the Generation Gap, you might strengthen in teachers and students alike that sense of continuity on which educational and national progress depend. You might establish a model of dialogue that could be copied by others--others that might have come to doubt that the generations can successfully communicate. You college and university presidents could prove once and for all to an opinion-making sector of student society that it <u>is</u> possible for them to trust someone over thirty.

Most important of all, perhaps, you could prove to yourselves that it is possible to trust someone <u>under</u> thirty. Communication, if it is to be the real article and not just lecturing, goes both ways. And if a few hundred, or a few thousand, or a few million American adults could learn <u>that</u> lesson about this remarkable new generation of ours, your time on this small, unlegislated, unfunded, un-Federal project would be well spent.

Thank you all for letting me spend some time with you.

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